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Ministry of Advanced Education

PROVINCE HOSTS INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE LITERACY CONFERENCE

VANCOUVER – The first conference to be hosted by the Province on essential skills and workplace literacy will bring together national and international experts along with government, educators, employers, labour and community organizations from all over B.C., Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell announced today.

"Improving literacy through essential skills training is key to British Columbians reaching their full potential in all aspects of their lives, as well as to our province's success in today's knowledge economy," said Coell, who is responsible for adult literacy in British Columbia and is one of three provincial ministers who will be attending the conference on Thursday and Friday at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver.

More than 1.25 million British Columbians between 16 and 65, or about 44 per cent, have numeracy levels that hold them back in the labour market. An estimated one million British Columbians in the same age group, or about 35 per cent, have low levels of literacy.

Nine skills have been identified as essential for individuals, and the organizations they work for, to keep pace with changes in the workplace. They are reading, writing, numeracy, using documents, using computers, oral communication, working with others, continuous learning and thinking skills.

"Developing these skills at the worksite is an important part of the Province's broader literacy strategy," said Education Minister Shirley Bond, who has overall responsibility for literacy in B.C. "We're ensuring all British Columbians, from toddlers to adults, are given every opportunity to improve their reading and literacy skills."

More than 200 people are expected to attend the conference. Expert presenters include Australian educator Louise Wignall, who will talk about the success of her country's innovative "Built In, Not Bolted On" policy of integrating literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training qualifications.

Canadian consultant Judith MacBride-King will discuss the importance of essential skills in attracting, retaining and engaging today's workers. Craig Alexander, deputy chief economist of TD Bank Financial Group, will cover the implications to the economy, employment and incomes. Program details are online at www.aved.gov.bc.ca/skillsandlearningbc/welcome.htm.

"B.C.'s booming economy has created unprecedented demand for skilled labour," said Economic Development Minister Colin Hansen. "Education and skills training play a huge role in building and sustaining a growing economy."

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The B.C. government has announced over $125 million in new literacy programs and services since 2001, and has launched ReadNow BC, a comprehensive action plan to improve British Columbians' literacy skills. The ReadNow BC website at www.readnowbc.ca includes a link to a database of literacy programs and services available throughout B.C., community by community.

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